DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 842 PS 028 964

AUTHOR Cohen, Cafi
TITLE Happily Homeschooling Teens: Do It Yourself, Do It Better, Do It for Less.
PUB DATE 2000-06-00
NOTE 18p.; For related documents, see PS 028 963-968.
AVAILABLE FROM Cafi Cohen, 375 Plancha Way, Arroyo Grande, CA 93420-4610; Tel: 805-473-4963; e-mail: cfcohen@pacbell.net ($4, plus $3 shipping and handling; California residents must add 7.25% sales tax).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Curriculum Development; Home Programs; *Home Schooling; Independent Study; *Nontraditional Education; Parent Student Relationship; *Parents as Teachers; Reference Materials; Secondary Education; Student Centered Curriculum

ABSTRACT

This booklet is the second in a series designed to assist parents who are home-schooling their adolescent children. The articles in the booklet are: (1) "Less is More," encouraging home-schooling families to take advantage of local, free resources before buying materials from a curriculum fair; (2) "Putting Together an Eclectic Curriculum," discussing how teenagers and their parents can work together to plan a curriculum incorporating traditional and non-traditional materials, unit studies, volunteer and community activities, and other approaches that encourage autonomy and enthusiasm for learning; (3) "Self-Directed Learning," providing suggestions for helping students become self-directed learners; and (4) "Lexicons, Map Books and Synonym Finders," discussing considerations for selecting essential reference books for creating rich home learning environments. (KB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

HAPPILY HOMESCHOOLING TEENS:

Do It Yourself, Do It Better, Do It For Less

by Cafi Cohen

ED 446 842

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Contents

➢ Less Is More 2

- Libraries-R-Us
- Comrades-In-Arms
- Community Groups
- Window Shopping
- Join The Web-Aholics
- Less-Is-More Library-Based Homeschooling For Teens

➢ Putting Together An Eclectic Curriculum 6

- Planning and Brainstorming
- Speaking Educationalese
- Cart Before The Horse
- I'm All Ears
- Whatever Works

➢ Self-Directed Learning. 10

- Self-Directed Activity
- Restricting TV
- Listening
- Facilitating
- Self-Instructional Materials
- Rich Home Learning Environment
- Cycles & Plateaus
- Ignorance is Bliss
- Adult Activities and Decisions
- Modeling Self-Directed Learning

➢ Lexicons, Map Books, and Synonym Finders . . .13

- Learning From Your Home Reference Library
  - What's That Word?
  - Tell Me All You Know About.....
  - Find Another Term
  - Map Books
  - Updating Encyclopedias and Atlases
  - Who Said That?
- Branching Out
- Popular References

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cafi Cohen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

PS 028964

Copyright Cafi Cohen 2000. All rights reserved.

PRICE: $4.00

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

LESS IS MORE

by Cafi Cohen

Hundreds of exhibitors lined the aisles at the last homeschooling conference I attended. There were educational games; nifty self-instructional computer math programs; complete lab science kits; history and art and music videos; all the "basics" of K-12 education on CD-ROM; even some wonderful books.

It all beckoned, promising to make my life easier by selling me the tools for The Perfect Homeschool Program. With unlimited funds, I would have had no trouble spending thousands of dollars. Good thing, with both kids in college, we are no longer in the homeschool shopping mode.

The growth of home education has created an explosion in use-at-home educational resources over the past 10 years. "Find a need and fill it," is a siren call American enterprise is answering by catering to the "needs" of homeschooling families.

Contrast this with the 1980's, when our research yielded only two programs in which we would have considered enrolling our older kids (others existed but philosophical differences precluded us from considering them). Now there are 10-20 programs that look interesting among more than a hundred "independent study schools" nationwide.

Previously it was difficult to find hands-on laboratory science and workable foreign language programs for older kids. Now these materials not only exist at reasonable prices, homeschoolers have choices.

The growth of homeschooling has also led to a similar explosion in the number of support groups in many areas. In the 1980's the single inclusive group in our large town (Albuquerque, New Mexico) was geared towards younger children.

Metro Denver, where we completed most of our homeschooling—as of 1996—had twenty-plus active support groups, including two specifically for those families homeschooling teenagers. Support groups have grown to point where they sponsor basketball teams, bands, choirs, yearbooks, hands-on science classes, spelling and geography bees, graduation ceremonies, skating and bowling parties and other social events, and much more.

In addition, technological advances over the last ten years put current information about all these programs and resources at our fingertips. On a recent tour of the Internet World Wide Web, I read a high school homeschooler's self-devised program, downloaded a practice SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test, a college entrance exam), and perused the "getting started with teenagers" recommendations of a popular homeschooling program.

These changes--businesses catering to the homeschool market; large, active support groups; and instant information access--seem like plusses. Too often, though, the plethora of information is daunting. New homeschooling families, especially those families with teenagers feel the problem acutely.

With adulthood around the corner, those parents want to do the right thing, the right thing often defined by the statement: "I don't want to do anything that will wreck his chances of _____." You fill in the blank – getting into college, finding employment, joining the military, living on his own, and so on. It is easy to be scared into trading big bucks for the assurance that you are doing the right thing.

So back to the exhibits. After cruising the hall and eyeing the dazzling displays, I found a comfortable perch and watched other homeschooling parents intently quizzing the vendors about products and schools and programs. And, gradually, it came back to me. I remembered what was

Really Good about homeschooling in the 1980's, when we began: we had few options.

What I learned from homeschooling in the old days, when large conferences, indeed any conferences, were unheard-of and when finding resources was like pulling teeth, is that you really don't need the glitzy stuff to succeed. In fact, avoiding glitz may be the key to more productive home education.

How is it that Less Is More? Could refusing to spend $500-$1,000 on new instructional materials not only save you money but also result in a better homeschooling experience for your family? The short answer is "Yes."

First consider that your community often provides better outlets for your kids' explorations than any program you could buy. For example, our daughter Tamara completed 4-H's Public Speaking Project two years in a row. This project required her to deliver a prepared speech, memorize and present a poem to an audience, speak extemporaneously on a topic, and compile a record of the experience, including an essay. Great "hands-on" Language Arts. Membership in 4-H was a fraction of the cost of many language arts programs; and 4-H yielded many other opportunities for education, socialization, and entertainment.

Second, looking first to the community for resources encourages autonomy and creative problem solving. A young homeschooler I know trades housework for pottery and Spanish lessons. Another teenage homeschooler attends her church's adult comparative religions class because she has a consuming interest in the topic and nothing is offered for her age group. A third has taught herself to sew, using a neighbor's machine and occasional help. Yet another has found algebra help through an on-line WEB site. And so on.

Third, searching the community models learning how to learn. Kids not only learn the subject, they learn how to locate resources to help them research any topic – an invaluable skill for adult life, one too often overlooked by schools.

So, before you pull out your checkbook at the next curriculum fair in response to a vague, panicky feeling, consider some of my favorite Less-Is-More resources from "the old days":

LIBRARIES-R-US

*At the top of the list is the public library. This is where all information searches begin. Our public library has, seemingly, almost everything. Any book (including any text) not on the shelves I can order inter-library loan and generally have within two weeks. Reference librarians are the unsung heroes at the apex of the library information retrieval. Start there first.

Our library, in our small Ohio town, has tapes and other materials for twenty-plus foreign languages, instructional videos for everything from algebra to zoology, historical documentary films, Internet access, science project idea books, announcements about cultural events in town, reading groups for all ages, magazines, and, of course, books!
The real attraction may be the books.

Don't feel that because you are relegated to the public library rather than privy to all the "goodies" at school that your kids will be shortchanged. Just the opposite. Public libraries have Real Books, not just textbooks. Real Books have several advantages: they represent many world views, are not dumbed down, and generally are more interesting. (Books produced by committees for school board approval can be incredibly dull, not to mention being so politically correct that they contain almost no information.)

For traditionalists, I would have no problem putting together an almost-free curriculum for teenagers entirely based on

material available at the local public library and at home (See sidebar: Less-Is-More Public Library Curriculum For Teenagers).

COMRADES-IN-ARMS

*Second Less-Is-More resource I love: other homeschooling families. Generally you will find these individuals through support groups. From our first support group experience, I learned quickly several important and money saving techniques. For example: we did not have to buy a full-service curriculum to succeed; source books and magazines contained resource reviews; local homeschoolers directed us to community team sports, drama groups, and much more.

Also, consider looking beyond your local group. When I first began doing beginner homeschooling workshops in the early 1990's, people would ask me how I "knew so much." The truth was that I had *no* original ideas, I simply read a lot (back to the library here) and, primarily through magazine subscriptions and some early WEB bulletin boards, I learned from homeschooling families nationwide. So many free or very inexpensive resources – especially on high school programs and college entrance – have come to my attention as a result of communicating with people this way.

In addition, attend statewide conferences to hear speakers from other parts of the country and listen to vendors, many of whom are homeschooling parents. Even if you don't buy their products, you will pick up invaluable tips. If you cannot attend, order tapes on the topics that interest you. Just as important, strike up conversations with strangers sitting next to you at these conferences. "How long have you been homeschooling?" is a good opener. You may learn more from them than from the speakers.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

*My third favorite resource? It seems there are special interest groups for everything. Some that my teenagers liked were church sports teams (basketball and volleyball and softball), skiing clubs, ballooning groups in Albuquerque, drama groups, special interest groups for environmental and other political causes.

WINDOW SHOPPING

*And resource number four: catalogs from homeschooling suppliers. Some catalogs are full of information for beginners, most notably the catalog from The Elijah Company (www.elijahco.com; 615 456-6284). It describes various homeschooling approaches and coordinates them to resources. It also has outstanding age-appropriate reading list recommendations.

Other catalogs I like for their reading list and alternative learning materials recommendations are Holt Associates (617 864-3100), The Drinking Gourd (800 TDG 5487), and Grace Llewellyn's Genius Tribe (541-686-2315). The reviews are brief, but thorough, and I can usually find the titles at the library. When I'm in the market for a title, I try to support these catalog suppliers, rather than the local bookstore.

JOIN THE WEB-AHOLICS

What to do with all the money you save from using the library, talking to experienced homeschooling parents, joining community groups, and reading catalogs? Here it is, the exception that proves the rule, Less Is More: buy a computer and join us on-line! The computer is the key to information access, and information can save you frustration, money, and time.

Additionally, having a computer in your home probably guarantees computer literacy for your kids, a skill second only to reading, writing, and basic math skills

for survival in the 21st century. I have met one young lady recently who had a computer at home and claimed, despite that, to be computer-phobic. But that's rare. More often, I see kids' computer skills surpassing those of their parents. This certainly happened in our house.

In addition to encouraging computer literacy, a computer and modem will connect you to the national homeschooling community—through bulletin boards, mailing lists, e-mail, etc. Receive daily support and talk with other parents experiencing difficulties similar to yours.

Of course, with a computer, you risk addiction, information overload, and dangerous Internet sites. And given the resources of the library, you can assemble an excellent almost-free, Less-Is-More homeschooling program without a computer. After all, there's no reason your kids cannot use the library computers to build computer skills.

So I can see the Less Is More argument applied to computers and on-line access, just as it is applied to, say, television. In general, though, I think the risks of the Internet are avoidable and that the advantages of having a computer in the home outweigh the disadvantages.

Less *is* more. Take advantage of local, free resources before you attend that next curriculum fair. Interview more experienced homeschooling families – especially those who homeschooled a decade or more ago – to learn how they addressed the challenges of homeschooling older kids. You will increase you options, save money, and model invaluable research skills for your teenagers.

LESS-IS-MORE LIBRARY-BASED HOMESCHOOLING FOR TEENS

Language Arts: Self-selected reading (use appendix in Nancie Atwell's marvelous book: *In The Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents* for recommendations; reference librarian can make additional suggestions); maintain a reading log. Daily Journal. Other writing opportunities (letters, newsletters, creative writing, etc.).

Math: Games for older kids from the book *Family Math* or from Janice Van Cleave's *Math For Every Kid*. In addition, use – for 2-3 week intervals, depending on the check-out period – whatever math text the library has at your kid's level.

Social Studies: Historical documentary films on periods of interest. Supplement with reading/writing papers on subjects your kid finds fascinating. Make a time-line/scrapbook on area of interest. Read several local and national papers at the library and compare reports of the same story (Current Events/Critical Thinking).

Science: Check out books on hands-on science that use materials found around the house. Again, Janice Van Cleave has some excellent titles for older kids. Also, check out science instructional videos and documentaries.

Foreign Language: Use library's instructional tapes, books, and other materials. Ask librarian if they can buy a program in which you are interested.

Fine Arts: Note posted announcements for plays, music programs, and speakers. In our community, many of these are free.

Computer literacy: Our small library currently makes a word processor and WEB browser available to patrons in half-hour intervals. Work first on word-processing skills.

PE: Walking or biking to and from the library!

PUTTING TOGETHER AN ECLECTIC CURRICULUM

by Cafi Cohen

A friend of mine says, "Failure to plan is planning to fail." I agree with her. Yet I have always been uncomfortable completely structuring our kids' learning activities. They often did excellent work just by following their noses.

Check out my son Jeff's progress during his teenage years towards earning his private pilot's license. At age 13, shortly after he started homeschooling, Jeff began studying for an amateur radio license, like his dad and I have. He listened to other amateur stations on the air, reviewed Federal Communications Commission rules and regulations, practiced receiving Morse code, and plunged into the a self-instruction, radio-oriented electricity and electronics course.

Jeff soon realized that he needed more advanced math skills to handle the electricity and electronics for the technical portions of the FCC exam. He increase his pace through his Saxon Algebra book. After several months, he successfully completed the FCC General Class Amateur Radio Examination (and a year later, with more math under his belt, the Advanced Class Exam). He was on the air.

As a licensed radio operator, Jeff spent hours each day talking to other "hams" all over the globe. One morning, he told me excitedly that he had met another teenage homeschooler on the radio. This contact, in another state, happened to be a member of the Civil Air Patrol Cadet Program. During scheduled conversations over the next few months, the cadet described to Jeff his CAP flight training. He also explained other objectives and activities of the organization and told Jeff how to find a local CAP cadet squadron.

Jeff followed up immediately. He began attending CAP meetings and taking written and physical tests to work his way up ranks, similar to those in the Air Force. After several years of participation, he eventually qualified not only for CAP private pilot training, but also for a scholarship to pay for same. What a deal. I couldn't have planned it. Jeff certainly did not have this course neatly mapped out from the beginning. With Jeff pursing his interests, one thing just led to another. Serendipity – almost.

One thing led to another, yet none of it would have happened if we had not been both well-organized and flexible. Teenagers need to learn to set goals and follow through. "Failure to plan is planning to fail." Serendipitous events may occur (as when my son began talking to the other CAP cadet on the radio); but it is primarily those with a goal-oriented, planning outlook who will benefit from those lucky occurrences.

Parents' homeschooling roles change with older kids. Younger children ask questions, and the parent answers or helps find answers. With older kids, a homeschoooling parent probably functions most effectively not as a teacher, but as a facilitator – someone who provides physical support, acts as a sounding board, and helps with planning and networking.

Through years of trial and error, with both Jeff and his younger sister Tamara, we developed a facilitating approach to planning homeschooling activities with our teenagers: Putting Together An Eclectic Curriculum. Our eclectic homeschooling program incorporated traditional materials, unit studies, unschooling time, volunteer work, community activities – and anything else that encouraged autonomy and enthusiasm for learning.

Putting Together An Eclectic Curriculum involves both teenager and parents in making decisions. At first, some

teenagers, especially new homeschoolers who are used to having no say in their education, may be apathetic. Ours initially were. Persistence pays off, though. Our kids improved markedly with repeated exposure to the process.

PLANNING & BRAINSTORMING

To begin planning an eclectic curriculum, we would first list the kid's current activities, academic and non-academic. Our kids were very active homeschoolers (possibly, because, with household chores, I could always make the alternative pretty unpleasant!), and this list could easily contain 15-20 items at any given time – things like piano lessons, 4-H projects, self-selected reading, journalizing, volunteer work, cross-country skiing, gardening, and daily math problem sets.

Next, we brainstormed the kid's current interests, goals, and priorities. I learned not to ask, "What are you interested in?" That question was usually met with a blank stare. Instead, I would try to be more concrete. "What do you see yourself doing in 2 years? In 5 years? What have you always wanted to do that you haven't had the opportunity to do yet? If nobody were telling you what to do, how would you spend next week and next month?" With teenagers, interests change every few months, so we reassessed every three to six months. Once a year did not provide enough flexibility.

With our two updated lists – (1) current activities and (2) interests, goals, and priorities – we planned the next three to nine months. Based on the interests, goals, and priorities, we reviewed the activities list and eliminated those activities which no longer fit. For example, when Jeff's CAP activities commandeered most of his time, he dropped 4-H.

Next, to address current interests and goals, we brainstormed new activities. When Tamara displayed an interest in medicine, we helped her find a hospital volunteer job. At one point Tamara wanted to drop piano lessons and take voice lessons. As a compromise (I wanted her to think about dropping the piano lessons for several months), we found a teacher who taught voice and piano simultaneously.

SPEAKING EDUCATIONALESE

We then reviewed the new activities list together and tried to assign academic classifications to the items on the list. The broad classifications were Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Physical Education, and Foreign Language. The 4-H Public Speaking project became Language Arts; Diving Team practice was PE; rocketry projects were classified as Science; music lessons were Fine Arts, reading the morning newspaper and watching historical films comprised Social Studies; and so on.

Why these classifications? Both kids planned to attend college. I knew that eventually I would prefer to document their experiences in educationalese, the language of the education establishment. I also knew we needed to assess ahead of time areas where the kids might need formal academic preparation – which leads to the next part of the process.

Following completion of the new activities list, we would discuss those academic areas not covered by the kids' activities. As they approached high school age, we became particularly concerned with foreign language and eventually decided to try correspondence course instruction. Once we had shopped around, we added a Spanish course to the activities list. Another example? When Jeff's math abilities exceeded those of the most advanced Saxon text then available, we suggested that he add a college math course to his homeschooling program.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CART BEFORE THE HORSE

Many might say our approach was backwards, that we should have planned academics and then filled in activities around the academics. Instead we concentrated on those things the kids liked to do, things they would do without our urging –and, a la John Holt – found ways to call those things "school". Our teenagers spent a majority of their time doing things they chose, things they liked, things they planned. Usually they devoted less than an hour each day to formal academic essentials, those subjects not included in their self-selected activities. Even these more formal materials were usually pretty well received, probably because the kids helped select them.

Benefits were tremendous. Both kids – anticipating the process – came up with creative additions to their educational menus. Tamara suggested corresponding with two Russian pen pals as part of her foreign language and social studies training. Jeff wrote articles for the CAP newsletter, and we called it Language Arts.

In addition, both kids became self-directed learners. They not only because self-directed learners, they learned how to learn. As they experimented with different learning situations, their expertise in selecting resources improved. They developed networking skills. And they motivated themselves. From my perspective as a homeschooling parent, what freedom! Our process, in my view, was largely responsible. Our "programs" evolved along the lines of the kids' interests. We planned and we maintained flexibility.

Writing the goals down and posting them kept all of us on track. I did not schedule the kids' days and weeks. Instead, each morning for about five minutes, I reviewed with each teenager what he or she had planned for the day. (I also used that time to assign household chores.) Sometimes I made suggestions or reminded them about something that appeared to be neglected. Occasionally, we reviewed the goals. I left scheduling specifics up to them. Implementation of the eclectic "curricula," with practice, became relatively painless and straightforward.

"I'M ALL EARS!"

With our process, we took into account the ideas and preferences of both kids and parents. No parent can ever guess which acitivities and subjects will be attractive to their kids. The process provided a mechanism wherein, at least onece every three to six months, we parents gave serious attention to what our teens had to say about their education – and they (the kids) listened to us.

Listening to teenagers is probably the most important thing that homeschooling parents can do. Listening to our teenagers saved us money and time. If one of them said that certain text looked terrible, we learned not to press the issue no matter how wonderful the material looked, how glowing the reviews. Listing to our teenagers helped us find those activities and resources best suited to them.

At the same time, parents should not discount their own ideas about what is important educationally. As an example, our daughter Tamara disliked math and science throughout her teenage years. She plodded through her math texts. At my insistence, she also took some science, moaning and groaning through some of it, but dutifully completing survey courses in physics and biology. She did well enough with the physics to earn college credit with the Advanced Placement examination.

At college, Tamara initially majored in English. Now, after a year, that subject and related subjects bore her. Recently she has decided to change her major to physics and engineering (she has enrolled in a 3+2 program, where she will earn degrees in both subjects). I am so glad we

vetoed her desire to avoid math and science as a high school homeschooler. Tamara concurs. She recently sent me the following Mark Twain quote: "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years." Such a gift.

WHATEVER WORKS

After homeschooling two teenagers this way, I have learned that there is something of value in all of the different homeschooling approaches. At the same time, I confess to sometimes feeling lost listening to other homeschooling parents rave about program X or unschooling or unit studies, especially when they exclude all other approaches and resources. For us, trial and error worked better than copying anybody else or adopting a specific curriculum or a specific educational philosophy. We made many mistakes; in baseball parlance, we had more strikes than hits. Fortunately, homeschooling gave all of us time to learn from those mistakes in a forgiving atmosphere. If something was not working, we simply dispensed with it and moved on.

Where traditionalists say that kids learn best with textbooks and grades and schedules, and

unit study proponents say that kids learn best with hands-on, thematic units, and

unschoolers say that kids learn best when their interests direct the learning,

eclectic home educators say that there is no one way that all kids learn best all the time.

--Cafi Cohen

Eclectic Curriculum for My Daughter, Age 13-14

Language Arts: 4-H Public Speaking project; lots of self-selected reading; journaling; correspondence

Science: Hospital volunteer work plus TV science documentaries

Math: Saxon Math alternating with recreational math and mental math games

Social Studies: History of Film with videos & books from the library

Fine Arts: Piano lessons; church choir; voice lessons; community drama productions

Physical Education: Cross-country skiing, biking, and hiking; Tae Kwon Do

Religious Studies: Church youth group and Sunday school

Foreign Language: Latin with self-instructional course

Other: Household chores (Home Economics); various sewing projects

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

by Cafi Cohen

Coordinating transportation was not the most difficult part of homeschooling two teenagers, but it could be a challenge. Every morning at breakfast we discussed the day's schedule, just so no one got stranded. An entry from my November, 1992, planning calendar is typical:

On this particular morning, Jeffrey, 17, says he will alternate studying physics and clearing the driveway (lots of snow in Colorado last night). I am glad he is willing to shovel for two reasons: our driveway is long (we jokingly refer to it as "the runway"), and I have a deadline for the resources column for the statewide homeschooling newsletter. I will drive Tamara, 15, to her hospital volunteer job and pick her up a little early so that Jeff has the car for piano lessons at 11:30 AM.

At home for lunch, Tamara will clear more snow. She has volunteered to do the sidewalks. Living on the corner of a main street, we will be ticketed if they are not shoveled. She will also squeeze in some work on her correspondence Biology and English Composition classes, probably in between answering calls from school friends who have "a snow day" and no idea how to fill it (if experience is any guide!).

Jeff will return from his piano students' homes and organize a Civil Air Patrol model rocketry class. He has taught the class previously and simply has to get his materials together. He hopes to have enough time to write a short article for the CAP newsletter as well.

I will grab the car and accompany Tamara as drives to her job at a local dry cleaning establishment (with a learner's permit, Tamara is not yet allowed to drive alone). Tamara is saving the job money for a student-exchange trip to Australia. Today, she will take her math book to the dry cleaner's and try to get a lesson done during her break and free time; the inclement weather just about assures a slow day at work for her.

I will run some errands: grocery store, music for my piano students, library to return books and movies. Back home, Jeff will probably be practicing piano. Around 4 PM, I will send him to pick up Tamara. He will drop her off at home and proceed to diving practice at the local Parks and Recreation Department pool.

Tamara needs to work on harmonies for a vocal piece she is learning for church. She also plans to help with dinner, so we will have everything ready when Terry, my husband, and Jeff return. After dinner (and the inevitable tussle over who does the dishes!), I will drive Tamara to Tae Kwon Do practice. Jeff will immerse himself in college application essays.

And so it went. According to my record, we accomplished everything planned, except the Tae Kwon Do. The streets iced up, making driving too dangerous. Instead, Tamara spent the evening at home, reading a novel and writing letters to friends. (As part of an on-the-move military family, Tamara always seemed to be writing to someone.)

Looking at journal entries like this, I realize that after several years of homeschooling (we began when the kids were in grades 6 and 7 and continued through high school), my teenagers had finally "made it." They had achieved my primary goal in homeschooling: they had become independent, self-directed learners.

What does that mean? In our case, it meant that both Jeffrey and Tamara planned their schedules and made good use of time. Their activities reflected goals and priorities – both theirs and the family's. Given good instructional materials, they could teach themselves. Most importantly, they had learned to locate their own resources (people,

materials, classes, interest groups) in the larger community.

What a long way we had come. Initially, both kids, conditioned by years of school, had waited for me to set the pace, to make decisions, and, if effect, to entertain them. How did we get from that inauspicious beginning to my description above?

It did *not* happen overnight. Through trial and error, though, we eventually discovered several family attitudes and practices that encourage self-directed learning. Here they are, in no particular order. Some techniques work better in some families than others. Some teenagers respond better, some worse, to certain approaches.

1. Encourage and support any **self-directed activity**. Self-directed activity is an activity the kid will do on his own, without your urging. It is what he does when nobody is telling him what to do. It may or may not look "academic" (although unschoolers show us how most of it can be cast in academic terms).

Why is it so important to encourage self-directed activity? Because self-directed activity leads to self-directed learning. Examples from our house included drawing, reading, hiking, re-arranging furniture, cooking and baking, planning meals, working with educational computer programs like Sim City, corresponding via e-mail, caring for pets, fixing things around the house, and cycling.

2. Get rid of, turn off, or **restrict TV** and mindless video games. My first choice was to get rid of the tube. My spouse disagreed, and we settled on a compromise. We restricted the kids to no more than one hour of TV daily, an hour which could not be "saved up." (By the way, this practice also proved beneficial to us adults.) With TV not an option, most kids will only stare at the four walls for so long. As time passed and our children involved themselves in various projects, they often did not even watch their daily hour.

3. **Listen** to your teenager. Discuss priorities and short range and long-term goals frequently. Add and drop activities as appropriate. The first couple of times you ask questions like, "What would you like to do this month (or year)?" or "What are your interests?" be prepared for blank looks. Try more specific, but less threatening questions: "What are you currently wondering about?" is a good opener.

4. Be a **facilitator**, not a full-time teacher. Help your teenage homeschoolers follow up on their wonderings. Libraries and librarians are an excellent place to begin. Consider other community resources. Our daughter learned sewing through 4-H. Our son studied electronics with the local amateur radio club.

5. Choose academic materials intended for **self-instruction**, and involve the homeschooler in the selection process. In reviewing texts and other materials, read the promotional literature and the prefaces and introductions. Very often, if the author intends that the material be used without a teacher, some statement has been made to that effect.

6. Create a **rich home learning environment**. Accumulate books and magazines (garage sales, library sales, school give-aways), movies and documentaries, cassette tapes, tools, art supplies, musical instruments, etc. Budget for a computer. Our teenagers often got more out of book that they "tripped over" in our home than they did from reading assigned by their correspondence courses.

7. Be aware of **cycles and plateaus**. Some times your kids will race through a subject and understand it thoroughly. Or they will happily explore uncharted territory completely on their own. Inevitably, also, there are those times when kids seem to accomplish nothing concrete for weeks or months on end. Do

not be so set on your program or educational philosophy that you fail to take into account the natural rhythms of learning.

8. Freely **admit your ignorance**. As a friend of mine says, every homeschooling parents "hits the wall" sooner or later; the student wants to explore a subject in which the parents have no expertise.

It happened to us when Jeff first expressed an interest in piloting an airplane. No way were we getting involved in that! Jeff eventually did earn his private pilot's license—through Civil Air Patrol. He not only learned to fly a single-engine aircraft, he learned to locate resources in the larger community to help him satisfy his goal.

9. Involve kids in **family "adult" activities and decisions**; and (here's the hard part) take your teenagers' comments and suggestions seriously. Do they have ideas for meals, pet care, house improvements, the budget? Take advantage of the creative potential of home-grown brain power.

10. **Model self-directed learning**. Pursue your interests to become a lifelong learner. Does this mean you should sit down with an English Literature text each night? Not necessarily. Your activities might range from Chinese cooking and computers to woodworking and weight lifting. Take classes, join community groups, teach yourself. Your teenagers may or may not find the same things appealing. Where your interests coincide, you will have fun learning together. Where they do not, your kids will see a daily example of self-directed learning, and absorb that.

I find television very educational. Every time someone switches it on, I go into another room and read a good book.

--Groucho Marx

What we want to see is the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child.

--George Bernard Shaw

Your children need your presence more than your presents.

-- Jesse Jackson

LEXICONS, MAP BOOKS, and SYNONYM FINDERS

by Cafi Cohen

Rich home learning environments have one commonality – interesting, attractive, informative reference books – usually too many to count. As your children reach adolescence, they will need adult reference works, readily available.

Some argue against buying dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases, saying either, "It's on the web," or "We can look it up at the library." Although usually true, both statements overlook the gestalt you create when you stock your home with reference works.

Let discuss the Internet alternative first. Even with millions of web pages, Internet searches can bog down into mind-numbing marathons. Yesterday I spent thirty minutes with search engines in an attempt to locate some educational statistics. When I finally gave up and turned to my almanac, I had answers within five minutes. Even if you have sophisticated searching skills, it is still faster to use reference works for some types of information.

Try an experiment the next time your teenagers have a question that require outside resources. Compare the speed of finding information in reference books versus the Internet. And compare the quality of the information. How did each resource obtain its information? Did the authors submit to any editorial or other review process?

Just as important as the convenience that good references afford, having your own thesauruses and almanacs creates a mindset that says your home is a learning environment – just as serious as the library, where they also stock references. Some families, especially those in rural areas, find their libraries so poorly stocked they cannot rely on them anyway. With even a few carefully selected references you can furnish basic information about most subjects. And you can provide it in a form that invites teens to snuggle up in a corner and read.

Finally, home reference works, unlike computers, are portable. Your teenagers can drag them to any reading or workspace. If you are planning a trip or building topographic displays at a garage workbench, having an atlas at the table works better than running into another room to check a computer screen.

LEARNING FROM YOUR HOME REFERENCE LIBRARY

Reference books serve two major purposes, the first obvious, the second less so. We use dictionaries, and encyclopedias, and atlases to conduct research and answer questions. "What were the routes and destinations of Columbus's voyages?" "How many electoral votes did our president receive?" "What are the greatest inventions of the 20th century?" "Where is Timbuktu?" These are all questions that make us reach for reference books.

References also provide entertainment in the form of browsing. Like window shopping, browsing may look like a fruitless activity. But it's not. Sometimes it spurs interest in topics you may never have considered. And often references teach in a way that textbooks cannot. My teenage son's favorite reading materials included several references, especially several books of world records. My daughter delighted in a reference book containing short anecdotes of famous people.

Families homeschooling teenagers should consider obtaining six basic references plus specialized books. In the remainder of this column, I will discuss considerations for choosing essential references and suggest some specialized titles.

What's That Word?

Of course, dictionaries top the list. We turn to dictionaries for spellings, definitions, word derivations, and examples of usage. Good dictionaries also include definitions of foreign terms

frequently encountered in English prose, like zeitgeist. Current dictionaries, fully up-to-date, also include geek-speak, hundreds of new words that have entered our language as a result of the computer revolution.

While multi-volume dictionaries may be more complete, your teenagers will prefer easy-to-use books they can take anywhere. We have several well-thumbed pocket dictionaries for different rooms of the house plus an excellent in-depth dictionary. A friend of mine raves about the American Heritage Dictionary.

Depending on your teenagers' interests, you may want to invest in specialized dictionaries as well. Future physicians will want medical dictionaries. Readers of eighteenth and nineteenth century literature will enjoy Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language. Often, when homeschooling our teens, we found ourselves often turning to our Dictionary of Legal Terms.

Tell Me All You Know About . . . .

Encyclopedias provide quick answers, especially in the areas of geography, history, and science. They have something to say about almost everything. As such, most home educators would feel lost without one.

Encyclopedia sets used to represent a major investment of hundreds of dollars or more. And, of course, you can still buy the expensive twenty to thirty volume sets if you prefer. Two other formats probably serve the needs of most home educators better, though. If you are tempted by a multi-volume encyclopedia, consider instead buying a single volume desk reference plus a CD-ROM.

The single volume encyclopedia, offers a less expensive alternative and answers probably eighty to ninety percent of the questions that send us running to an encyclopedia. Random House and other publishers offer single volume quick reference encyclopedias for less than $15.00.

CD-ROM encyclopedias cost a fraction of the hard copy multi-volume sets and take up far less room. In addition, they have superior searching capabilities. The initial CD-ROM products were sketchy affairs, not much better than a good dictionary. Newer products, like the World Book CD-ROM, include the entire text and photos of the hard copy version.

Find Another Term

Authors use thesauruses and synonym finders to pinpoint the right word and avoid tedious repetition. If you keep a thesaurus wherever your teenagers write, they will eventually wonder they ever got along without it.

Synonym finders come in different formats, so it pays to select one with your teen. Some thesauruses also include a section on antonyms (opposites) that you may find helpful.

Map Books

Current events in far-flung corners of the globe send us to one of our atlases weekly, if not daily. Of course, history students and travelers consult atlases frequently as well. We do not have anything big, fancy, or expensive. Over the years, we found that one or two student atlases – usually priced less than ten dollars – suffice for most needs.

Updating Encyclopedias and Atlases

Almanacs, issued annually, contain current facts, figures, and maps. The recently-released World Almanac 2000 has sections on the year in review; economy and business; astronomy and the calendar; noted personalities; science, the internet, and computers; travel, health, and consumer information; and much more. It is like somebody published a yearbook not for a high school, but for the entire world – with a United States emphasis.

Homeschoolers use almanacs to enrich discussions of current events. Some almanacs also contain good reports of recent twentieth century history –

something poorly covered by most textbooks. These sections are fun to browse and discuss.

Who Said That?

When it comes to the Big Ideas like creativity, freedom, morality, and even learning, nothing beats referring to a quotation book. Consider these pithy remarks about education.

*Education is hanging around until you've caught on. – Robert Frost

"Life is my college. May I graduate well, and earn some honors! – Louisa May Alcott

Why say something poorly when you can say it better by quoting somebody famous and simultaneously create the impression you spend time reading serious authors? Your teens will refer to quote books to write speeches and papers. Several teens have told me they love browsing quotation books, just to consider new wrinkles on old ideas.

FIND THEM CHEAP

Try the following to build a **home reference library for pennies.**

*Used book stores
*Bargain counter of new bookstores
*Library sales
*Used curriculum sales
*Garage, yard, church sales
*Friends, neighbors, relatives (help them clean their basement and attic storage areas)
*Thrift shops
*School discards (call your district and ask what they do with them)
*Suggest reference materials as holiday gifts to the grandparents!

In addition to dictionaries, encyclopedias, and atlases, many families acquire specialized references. These will differ from family to family. Your teenagers' interests dictate which specialized resources you invest in.

Classic Literature

Families homeschooling teenagers repeatedly cite three essential classic literature collections. These are the Bible, Shakespeare's complete works, and collections of Greek and Roman mythology. So many literary allusions trace their origins to one of these three sources that it makes sense to keep all three on your bookshelf.

When Bible shopping, remember that there are now hundreds of translations, some more readable than others. Many families recommend buying accompanying concordances and commentaries to help locate and explain different sections.

Like Bibles, Shakespeare and mythology collections come in many formats. Look for readability and good indexing.

Science Helps

Two references stand out here. Gray's Anatomy tells and shows you more than you ever thought to ask about the human body. Teens who envision a future in the medical professions and even adolescents with burning curiosity about how our muscles and nerves and blood vessels all fit together will find Gray's fascinating.

As an alternative to detailed depictions of the human body, some families prefer field guides, which contain pictures and detailed descriptions for almost everything you would see on a nature hike -- rocks and minerals, wildflowers, trees, reptiles, birds, stars, you name it. Get several if you have any budding naturalists at home.

When, Who, and Where?

While they may study individual historic events or time periods in depth, timelines help many teenagers develop a feel for the panorama of history. Several good ones on the market not only show the sequence of events, but they relate the simultaneous history of different countries and regions of the world.

Books of chronologies present timeline information in verbal rather than graphic form. They also usually focus on one topic at a time, allowing readers to see the development of a certain technology or

discipline. The New York Public Library Book of Chronologies has sections on the U.S. automobile industry and natural disasters, among hundreds of others. It makes for fun browsing and provides succinct summaries of the history of a wide range of topics.

Say It Right

Grammar references have a place in many homeschool libraries. Two that are frequently recommended include the Write Source 2000 and the classic The Elements of Style by Strunk and White.

The Fun Stuff

Throughout this article, I have mentioned that several references entertain as well as inform. Include additional popular browsers for your next rainy day. My current favorites are The Top Ten of Everything, An Incomplete Education, The Guinness Book of World Records, and The Writer's Guide to Everyday Life in the 1800's. Depending on your teenagers' interests, other titles may suggest themselves. Leave them out to pique interest or just to make readers smile.

POPULAR REFERENCES

- *The All-American Quote Book* by Michael Reagan and Bob Phillips
- *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*
- *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* by John Bartlett
- *The Book of Musical Anecdotes: Hundreds of Classic and Little-Known Stories About the World's Greatest Composers and Performers* by Norman Lebtecht
- *The Book of Positive Quotations* edited by John Cook
- *The Cambridge Encyclopedia* (single volume) by David Crystal
- *Commentary on the Whole Bible* by Matthew Henry
- *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* by William Shakespeare and David Bevington Editor
- *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* by John Zimmerman
- *Dictionary of Legal Terms: A Simplified Guide to the Language of Law* by Steven Givis
- *A Dictionary of Quotations from Shakespeare: A Topical Guide to over 3,000 Great Passages from the Plays, Sonnets, and Narrative Poems* by William Shakespeare, Hugh Rawson and Margaret Miner
- *A Dictionary of Who, What, and Where in Shakespeare: A Comprehensive Guide to Shakespeare's Plays, Characters, and Contemporaries* by Sandra Clark
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E. B. White
- *Gray's Anatomy: Anatomy, Descriptive, and Surgical* by Henry Gray
- *An Incomplete Education* by Judy Jones and William Wilson
- *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* by Edith Hamilton
- *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* by James Strong
- *The New York Public Library Book of Chronologies* by Bruce Wetterau
- *The New York Public Library Desk Reference (3rd Edition)* by Leclerc, Paul (Preface) and Paul Fargis, Editor
- *1,911 Best Things Anybody Ever Said* by Robert Byrne
- *Peterson Field Guides* on rocks, birds, wildflowers, stars, trees, insects, mammals, and so on.
- *Roget's International Thesaurus*
- *Student Atlas of World Geography* by John Allen
- *The Student World Atlas* by Julia Gorton and Nicholas Price
- *Synonym Finder* by J.I. Rodale, J.I., Nancy Laroche and Faye C. Allen
- *The Timetables of American History* by Laurence Urdang
- *The Top Ten of Everything 2000* by Russell Ash

Distance runners have good advice for home educators: "Start slowly and then ease up!"

--Cafi Cohen

Cafi Cohen, homeschooling mom, is the author of ***"And What About College?" How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities, 2nd Edition*** (Holt Associates, 2000) and ***Homeschooling: The Teen Years*** (Prima, 2000). She writes columns for *Home Education Magazine*, *Homeschooling Today*, and the *LINK*. Her website, Homeschool-Teens-College, contains helps for families homeschoooling 11-18 year-olds at www.homeschoolteenscollege.net. She also presents workshops at homeschool conferences nationwide. For more information about Cafi's books and workshops, contact her at: 805 473-4963 or 473-9045 or at cfcohen@pacbell.net.

"Education is too important to be left solely to the educators."

--Francis Keppel

BOOKLETS IN THE SERIES:
HAPPILY HOMESCHOOLING TEENS by Cafi Cohen

MOVING INTO THE WORLD
*The S Word
*Ideas for Teen Homeschooling Groups
*Volunteering
*Transition To The World Of Work
*Learning To Fish: Networking

DO IT YOURSELF, DO IT BETTER, DO IT FOR LESS
*Less Is More
*Putting Together An Eclectic Curriculum
*Self-Directed Learning
*Lexicons, Map Books, and Synonym Finders

THE THREE R'S
*Developing A Writer's Toolkit
*Encouraging Reading
*Rethinking Midschool/HighSchool Math
*10 CounterIntuitive Math Teaching Tips

BEYOND THE THREE R'S
*Habla Espanol?
*History For Everyone
*Learning and Doing Science
*Lifetime Fitness

HIGH SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS & COLLEGE ADMISSIONS
*"How Do We Know When We're Done?"
*Independent-Study and Umbrella Schools
*College Admissions Tests
*Changing Face of College Admissions

ENCOURAGEMENT
*First Year Surprises
*Decompression FAQ
*Dealing With Doubts
*"But I Want To Go To School!"
*Ten Reasons To Homeschool Through High School